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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the services offered by OhioLINK, a consortia providing a variety of services to a statewide user population of college and university libraries, focusing on the impact of these services on traditional interlibrary loan. The first section describes patron-initiated book requesting. The second section addresses the Electronic Journal Center, an archive of ejournals (electronic journals) that have been licensed by OhioLINK. The third section discusses the effects of OhioLINK ejournals on lending. (MES)

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We're still here: Traditional ILL after OhioLINK Patron-initiated requesting and Ejournals

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
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OhioLINK has been a leader as a consortia providing a variety of services to an state-wide user population of college and university libraries. Its central function is the union catalog of materials held by its member institutions (Ohio Board of Regents 1989, 4) but an increasing number of services make OhioLINK more than just its catalog. At this time, OhioLINK has 79 institutional partners and has been recognized most widely for its patron-initiated circulation function. The catalog allows patrons to search for material held at all the institutions easily and see the availability of the material at any library..

Patron-Initiated Book Requesting

Patrons at any of the institutions can request a book that is available from any of the other institutions, using the circulation system after a search of the central catalog rather than their interlibrary loan office. A courier service delivers the books within a couple of days to the borrowing patrons library or campus office, so the service is much faster than traditional interlibrary loan services ever were.

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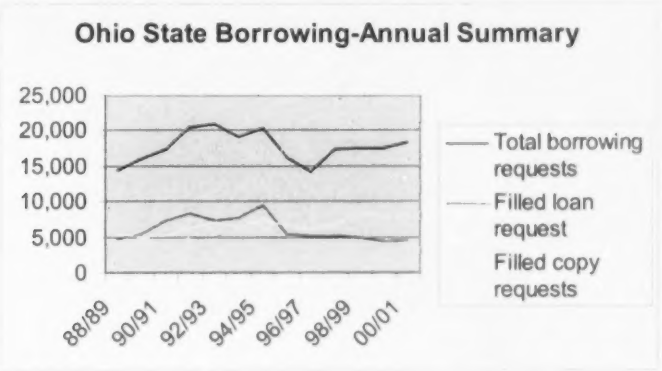
Figure 1. Ohio State: Interlibrary Loan Borrowing—Annual data



A look at what happened to traditional interlibrary loan borrowing at our institution illustrates the effect of this service on traditional ILL. Soon after the Ohio State University turned on patron-requesting in May, 1995, the number of requests to our Interlibrary Loan office and the resulting number of loan requests filled, dropped dramatically. Figure 1 graphically illustrates that drop in requests and filled loans at Ohio State while Table 1 shows the numbers. Over the course of the last 6 years ILL borrowing of returnable has remained steady since that initial drop-off---and tends to be materials such as dissertations/theses, microfilm and non-English books, rather than English-language books.

So while in 1995, we filled 9,544 loan requests, the following year we filled only 5,318 (see Table 1). Last year's circulation data shows that Ohio State patrons borrowed 70,192 books through OhioLINK's patron-initiated borrowing service, contrasted with the 4,362 returnables borrowed through our office. We're still here, but compared to OhioLINK book requesting, we are a much-smaller-scaled operation. Offer a service like patron-initiated requesting and patrons will use it, but it doesn't replace much of the ILL activity, its a separate demand and supply.

Table 1. Ohio State: Interlibrary Loan and OhioLINK borrowing annual data.

	OhioLINK	**Traditional Interlibrary Loan**			
Year	OSU patron-borrowing	Borrowing			Lending
		Requests	Filled loans	Filled copies	Requests
88/89		14,381	4,781	5,318	32,282
89/90		15,878	5,378	4,856	29,864
90/91		17,314	7,305	5,099	33,856
91/92		20,540	8,363	6,393	34,719
92/93		20,781	7,315	6,995	34,240
93/94		19,045	7,769	6,390	37,551
94/95		20,310	9,544	7,433	42,606
95/96	47,152	16,070	5,318	6,439	47,740
96/97	68,028	14,102	5,069	6,016	49,161
97/98	66,029	17,310	5,168	6,909	53,117
98/99	66,859	17,491	4,873	8,381	49,688
99/00	70,192	17,553	4,362	7,948	52,661
00/01*	60,618	18,328	4,498	8,355	55,000

* Year 00/01: OhioLINK shows actual data for 10 completed months of year, for ILL, annualized estimates are given.

So although patron-initiated borrowing fills demand for books, for journal articles the OhioLINK strategy has been the acquisition of collections of ejournals for the whole system rather than developing a service using the journal resources that already exist on paper in the partner institutions. David Kohl describes the strategy, 'Our approach is jointly to purchase system-wide rights to the full-text electronic versions of the articles." (Kohl 1998, 68). He noted that this system provides an alternative to the "costly and time-consuming" activity required to retrieve articles from the stacks and scan or send out those articles.

Ejournals and the Electronic Journal Center

OhioLINK has developed the Electronic Journal Center, an archive of ejournals which have been licensed by OhioLINK. At this time, it contains 4,020 serial titles, with 2.6 million articles from 14 publishers---but the numbers change almost daily. Academic Press and Elsevier were the first publishers included in the program (data from the OhioLINK staff website).

The question that came to our mind as these contracts have been signed and the titles became available, is what would be the effect on ILL of this new type of patron-initiated service? Would it follow the patron-initiated borrowing model that we experienced for books and diminish our traditional ILL activity? With ejournals, our patrons can get-it-themselves using the Electronic Journal Center and can bypass using interlibrary loan services as well as their local library. Milton has reported the increase in full-text usage contributed to the decline in interlibrary loan activity at her institution.

The answer is: We haven't seen the number of requests we get at Ohio State University in Interlibrary Loan diminish yet.

Looking again at Table 1 where you can see that the number of **total borrowing** requests we get is still increasing as is the number of filled copy requests.

Why is this? Another service OhioLINK provides is access to a large number of databases. Our patrons use these tools which frequently result in ILL demands if we do not own the journal. As our access to a larger number of more specialized databases increases, the demand for more unusual journals seems to increase as well. But at the same time as these changes have taken place has been the rise of the Internet, the largest finding tool, giving our patrons access to a world of references. We are seeing more requests where the source of the citation, whether good or bad, is the Internet. At the same time, we also use it as a verification tool ourselves. In short, as the number of identification tools increase or become more convenient, we find we are getting requests for more things that are more difficult to verify or find a source for.

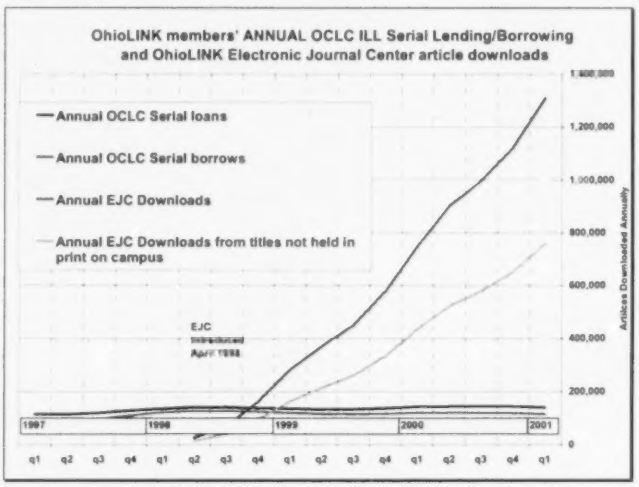
Another reason we may not have seen our access to ejournals diminish interlibrary borrowing yet, is all those ejournal titles didn't become available at one time Sally Rogers notes in her article on electronic journal usage (Rogers 2001, 27), in 1998 we had access to Academic and Elsevier publications numbering 1200 and by May 2000, we had 3,000 titles.

Our own environment may play a role as well. At Ohio State our interlibrary loan electronic requesting is not available to undergraduates, so while ejournals may serve to reduce requests at institutions that serve a large number of undergraduates, at Ohio State, our ILL department has more limited service. But

Rogers found that OSU patrons liked the 24-availability and easy access of ejournals, since we offer authenticated remote access.

In the case of ejournals, we haven't seen the number of interlibrary loan requests reduce, but we can see the dramatic surge in the use of electronic journal articles. So let's look at the use of the EJC and compare it to Interlibrary loan activity throughout OhioLINK, rather than only at Ohio State.

Figure 2 OhioLINK EJC downloads contrasted against OCLC ILL activity throughout OhioLINK



The author would like to thank Tom Sanville, Director of OhioLINK, for providing this figure. May, 2001

Here we see interlibrary loan activity from all OhioLINK schools (OCLC ILL subsystem data reported) contrasted with the use of the Electronic Journal Center, downloads of ejournal articles. Note traditional ILL, hovers flat-lined across the bottom of the figure. Little change in interlibrary loan activity is shown while a dramatic shift has been the use of this new technology over the last two years.

An interesting aspect of this chart, meriting consideration, is the difference between the two steep lines. The top line, of total downloads, is shadowed by a line illustrating downloads of titles not held in paper at the patron's institution. The space under that line represents the use of titles new to campus users while the space between the two lines suggests the use of titles already on campus, what we would call patron-convenience factors—things like 24/7 availability, remote rather than campus use, etc. It looks like at least half of the downloads are done by patron's whose institutions subscribe to the title in paper as well.

Lending activities

While we have focused on the effects of patron-requesting of books and the EJC for our patrons, what has been the effect of OhioLINK ejournals on lending?

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One aspect is that the OhioLINK partnership provides for all the members to give free interlibrary loan to each other. As a result we use one another as sources for obtaining photocopies for our patrons. In her thesis on OhioLINK resource sharing at the University of Toledo, Pat Breno noted the change in percentage of photocopies filled in-state from 22% in 1992 (pre OhioLINK) to 80% in 1998 (Breno 1998, 35). At OSU, currently only about 32% of our photocopy borrowing comes from an OhioLINK partner so there remain strong institutional differences. While the OhioLINK agreement brought us a large number of reciprocal relationships to use, too few OhioLINK libraries use ARIEL. But we do see in lending an increase use of the partnership since at OSU, in 1995 we filled 3,079 copy requests for our OhioLINK partners; in 2001 it will be over 5,000.

So what happens to traditional interlibrary services as OhioLINK provides more options for patrons obtaining materials? Scott Van Dam described ILL as occupying a distinctive "niche", as a specialty operation, one of a set of solutions to obtaining material for patrons. Even today that description sounds right for our borrowing activity of returnables, as OhioLINK patron-initiated requesting fills the majority of patron loan needs and ILL fills in the gaps. But for photocopies, I wouldn't consider our work a niche business yet; while we still do some highly specialized work, it is still a volume business. In numbers it can't compete with the Electronic Journal Center, but we may see a future where our patrons have access to ejournals of a larger set of major publishers, as well as a migration of publishing from associations to those publishers. Interlibrary loan may fill "what's left" and become the niche business Van Dam described. Although our numbers are dwarfed by the scale of OhioLINK services, patron-initiated borrowing or electronic journal downloads, our services still maintain a viable role within the growing constellation of services offered.

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